



Childhood Connections

April 3, 2025

Spotlight on Office of Childhood Teams!

Throughout 2025, this newsletter will spotlight team members who work in the Office of Childhood (OOC) and their “why” for supporting children, families, and the professionals who work directly with them.



Sara Ruediger is the Program Manager for the Early Intervention section. Her team oversees the Missouri First Steps program, which is the state's early intervention program under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. They ensure effective implementation of federal and state regulations and supervision of contracts used to implement the Part C system. They also coordinate with multiple partners to provide streamlined and effective services for infants and toddlers with disabilities in Missouri. With 15 years of experience in early childhood, Sara began her career as a Head Start teacher in a “twos” classroom and provided case management for citizens enrolled in the Missouri Work Assistance program prior to coming to DESE. Her “why” is driven by the desire to build parents' skills, knowledge, and confidence to positively support their child's development.

Jodeen Maness is a Program Coordinator and the training and technical assistance team lead for the Early Intervention section. She works with [her regional team](#) to implement trainings, technical assistance, and manage contracts for System Point of Entry (SPOE) offices and First Steps providers across the state. She collaborates closely with the Early Intervention and Compliance staff to monitor trends, implement program guidance, and give support with evidence-based practices and quality



program initiatives. She also assists with promoting the importance of early intervention for infants and toddlers. Jodeen has worked in early childhood for 23 years, starting as a Title I Pre-K teacher in the Morgan County R-2 School District. Her “why” comes from seeing how children benefit from early intervention and the desire to provide families who have children with special needs or developmental delays the support, resources, and quality services they deserve.



Martha Wilkerson is a Program Specialist and compliance team lead for the Early Intervention section. Her career has spanned 30 years in public education working with students from preschool to high school. After retiring from her position as a special education administrator, she came to DESE to continue building relationships and giving children and families a voice. Her “why” comes from the fulfillment she finds in helping individuals feel supported through strengthening and empowering families. Being able to make a positive difference in their lives provides hope for a better future.

REMINDER! In-Person Listening Sessions for Child Care Licensing

In support of [the Executive Order 25-15](#) issued by Governor Kehoe, charging DESE with a minimum of 10% reduction in regulations, OOC has the opportunity to update child care licensing rules.

OOC staff is hosting in-person listening sessions to gather feedback from stakeholders related to child care licensing rules. Thank you to the 130 stakeholders who attended the in-person listening sessions in St. Louis and Cape Girardeau. We appreciate your feedback and willingness to be a part of the solution. Together we will make meaningful change to improve the Missouri child care landscape.

Listening sessions will continue to be held regionally in April. See [the In-Person Listening Sessions Flyer](#)



ANNOUNCEMENT! April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is nationally recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Friday, April 4, 2025, is Go Blue Day. Wear blue to show your support for preventing child abuse.

Every child deserves a happy, healthy childhood free of abuse and neglect, and every family needs and deserves the

for information on the dates and locations of sessions in your region.

Learn more about Executive Order 25-15 regarding revisions to child care licensing rules on [the Secretary of State's website](#).

ANNOUNCEMENT! Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant Application Open

Applications are open for the [2024 Comprehensive Literacy State Development \(CLSD\) grant](#) provided by the U.S. Department of Education. The five-year grant will provide statewide opportunities for early learning programs, K-12 schools, and area career centers to receive services and funds that directly align to [DESE's Read, Lead, Exceed initiative](#).

For more information, see:

- [CLSD Administrative Memo](#)
- [CLSD Guidance Document](#)

Applications for early learning programs may be completed by filling out [the CLSD application](#) and emailing it to DESE.CLSD@dese.mo.gov by **midnight on Friday, April 11, 2025**.

For questions regarding the grant or application process, please email DESE.CLSD@dese.mo.gov

ANNOUNCEMENT! Missouri Childhood Resource and Referral Center

Effective May 1, 2025, Child Care Aware of Missouri (CCAMO) will provide statewide Missouri Childhood Resource and Referral (MCRR) services. The MCRR Center will utilize CCAMO staff, a contracted call center partner, and regional partners across the state who have boots on the ground.

The MCRR Center and its partners will:

- Deliver high-quality customer service to families and others so they experience prompt, courteous, and helpful assistance.
- Help families know where to find the online application for child care subsidy assistance and how to complete the subsidy application.
- Provide regional outreach across Missouri to better assist families face-to-face in completing their subsidy application.
- Refer child care providers to the DESE for the support they need.
- Guide families with finding child care in their requested zip code(s), help families find

support to make this a reality.

Download and share [the Child Abuse Prevention Month Toolkit](#) to help prevent child abuse.

CELEBRATE! Week of the Young Child

April 5 – 11, 2025, is the Week of the Young Child! Celebrate children and early learning this week with creative and collaborative activities.

Whether building, cooking, singing, or creating, you can help children learn through fun-filled projects.

For a list of themed activities for young children, from Music Monday to Family Friday, visit [Week of the Young Child Themed Days on the Early Connections webpage](#).

ANNOUNCEMENT! National Home Visiting Week (NHVW) is April 21-25, 2025!

The inaugural National Home Visiting Week (NHVW) will take place April 21-25, 2025, an observance to celebrate and recognize home visitors and the positive impact they make on maternal and child health outcomes.

For more information and to access the NHVW toolkit, visit the Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professions' [National Home Visiting Week webpage](#).

openings at child care programs, and upon request, provide families quality indicator information on child care programs.

- Assist families, child care providers, and others locate community resources via the Missouri Family Resources site.
- Inform DESE of any barriers to accessing subsidy assistance or referrals for child care.
- Regularly review phone calls to ensure consistency in messages and evaluate customer service for improvement.

The MCRR Center and its partners **are not** responsible for:

- Processing family applications for subsidy or child care provider subsidy applications and contracts.
- Determining subsidy eligibility.
- Issuing or confirming subsidy payments and resolutions.
- Reconciling incorrect subsidy payments, overpayments, or underpayments.

Phone calls and emails for child care subsidy-contracted providers will be referred directly to the Office of Childhood. Providers can contact 573-526-3011 or CCSubsidyAgreements@desemo.gov for questions about subsidy provider applications or contracts. Providers can contact 573-522-1385 or CCPayments@desemo.gov for questions about subsidy provider payments.

ANNOUNCEMENT! Kindergarten Observation Form Registration is Now Open

DESE is again offering free training for LEAs that choose to use the Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF) for their Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA). A KEA is a one-time assessment designed to measure a child's skills and behaviors within the first few weeks of entering kindergarten. Using KEA data can help inform teachers and leaders of the number of children who are ready for school overall, as well as support instruction by meeting students where they are when they enter kindergarten. Please visit our [Kindergarten Entry Assessment](#) webpage for more information.

Learn more about the training in [the Administrative Memo](#) sent to all LEAs on March 10, 2025.

ANNOUNCEMENT! Cochlear Implant Educational Consultation Services

Free cochlear implant educational consultation services are available to any Missouri school district

REMINDER! Transition from First Steps to Early Childhood Special Education

Many children in the Missouri First Steps program transition to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services through their local school districts.

The OOC has a webpage with information and training on this transition for First Steps and ECSE staff!

To view the recorded transition training, frequently asked questions, and other important transition resources, visit [the transition webpage](#).

REMINDER! Subsidy Payment Resolution Requests

Per [the child care subsidy contract terms and conditions](#), providers have 60 days from the end of a service month to submit a Payment Resolution Request (PRR) if there was a discrepancy in their payment.

If you have a payment discrepancy, be sure to submit a PRR within the required 60-day timeframe.

REMINDER! Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Missouri

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Missouri is available in every zip code in Missouri. Children birth to age 5 years can be

serving students with cochlear implants (PK-12). Services are individualized and often include information on device functioning, speech and auditory development, educational development, modes of communication, etc. Service delivery is primarily through Zoom, phone conferences, and email correspondence.

During the spring 2025 semester, consultation services are offered each Thursday from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Flexibility on scheduling for other times may be available to meet the needs of students with cochlear implants on a case-by-case basis.

For information about the services, please contact Dr. Karen Engler at KarenEngler@Missouristate.edu.

For other assistance, please contact Kristin Funk at Kristin.funk@dese.mo.gov or call 573-751-7661.

THANK YOU! 52nd Conference on the Young Years

Thank you to the over 1,800 Early Childhood Professionals who attended the 52nd Conference on the Young Years (CYY). CYY provides resources and information to expand learning for professionals working with children from birth to third grade and their families. Over 120 break out presentations and 52 exhibitor booths offered a wide variety of topics to promote lifelong learning, motivate educators, and support continued growth.

This year's conference keynote speaker lineup included LaVonna Roth, Dr. Daniel Truelove Jr., Harrison Chad and Josh Seiden of SO Fun City, Thomas Murray, and Eric Ode. CYY also included the 3rd annual gala hosted by the Missouri Association for the Education of Young Children with more than 1,000 attendees.

Save the Date! Make plans to attend the 2026 Conference on the Young Years, March 5-7, 2026.

A call for proposals for the 2026 Conference on the Young Years will be issued in May 2025. Updates will be posted to [the CYY webpage](#).

ANNOUNCEMENT! Missouri Professional Development System - Complete Profile

February brought major updates to the MOPD System. One major change is the term 'Apply for Membership' was replaced with 'Complete Profile'. This term was changed to clarify:

registered by their parent or guardian to receive one free book per month.

There is no cost to families and there is no limit on how many children in Missouri can sign up.

Parents can register their children at [Check Availability at the Imagination Library webpage](#).

- There is no membership fee or other member requirements to complete this step.
- This step is necessary to fully complete all required steps for the system to function correctly.
- A user profile must be completed after an account is created, like many other online websites.

See video or written instructions to 'Complete Profile' at [MOPD Instructions](#).

Spotlight on Success

Spotlight on Success aims to share stories from local programs that are building community partnerships in order to strengthen and coordinate childhood programs.



United Way of Central Missouri photo: Early Childhood Professions students from Nichols Career Center and their instructor Jennifer Eldringhoff "rock out" at the Conference of the Young Years.

Kurt Hafley, a Childhood Community Leader in the South Central Region and Early Childhood Program Director for United Way of Central Missouri, knows the importance of planning to make things better for the future. Kurt says, "We need to make a change that may never benefit us personally but will make things better for those yet come". He is looking to plant seeds for the future; early childhood programs and educators are one example of important seeds planted in a child's life.

Recently United Way partnered with Hitachi Energy and JC Schools foundation to help students at the Nichols Career Center in Jefferson City attend the 2025 Conference on the Young Years (CYY), with Kurt attending to facilitate the trip. The high school program, for junior and seniors, at Nichols Career Center gives students hands-on training alongside course work to achieve a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). Students spend over 120 hours in the classroom to go alongside their 4480 hours of instruction. The nationally recognized CDA credential is a great planted seed for students who want to be early childhood educators.

When students at the program expressed interest in attending the upcoming CYY, Kurt and United Way worked with Hitachi Energy and JC Schools Foundation as community partners to help these students attend. Through these community partners, every student who wished to go was registered, including lodging and accommodations. Students attended the event for two days at no costs to themselves.

Kurt has called it a “highlight of their high school experience and one that they will remember for the rest of their lives.” The wide variety of topics at CYY provided them with resources and information that will grow their early childhood learning.

“This program is certainly trying to solve a problem. We need more early childhood educators and the Early childhood Professions program is doing just that,” Kurt said.

OOO Monthly Stakeholder Webinar

Join us for the next OOC Stakeholder webinar on **Tuesday, April 29, 2025**, from noon to 12:45 p.m. to learn more and ask questions. You can [access the webinar](#) in a Google Chrome or Safari web browser. Do not view in Internet Explorer. We hope you can participate!

A [recording](#) and [the PowerPoint slides](#) from the March 2025 webinar are available in case you were unable to attend and wish to hear the information.

For questions about the stakeholder webinar series, or suggestions for topics in future webinars, email us at Childhood@dese.mo.gov.

Archived Editions of Childhood Connections

[Visit the OOC webpage to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.](#)

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DESE Office of Childhood | 205 Jefferson Street - 1st Floor | Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

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